

## THE IMPACT OF POST-STRUCTURALISM ON THE IDEAS OF EDWARD SAID

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### Abstract

Having been influenced by Foucault's and Derrida's deconstructive ideas, Edward Said challenges the misrepresentation of the Orient with respect to the relation between power and knowledge. Said's deconstructive challenge on the issues of knowledge, power and representation is directed to the Orientalists' representation of Orient in their literary works. The Orientalists have fabricated a language through which they have conveyed their thoughts and imaginings about Orient via encoded signs. That's to say, they have ordered the things in accordance with their ideology. What Said does is to deconstruct the Orientalists' misrepresentations of the Orient by dwelling on the principles of post-structuralism. Attempting from the function of signs in creating an encoded message or representation in the depictions of Orientalists, Said challenges them by decoding their hidden intent via their own literal weapons. The main thesis of this study aims to display Said's findings in relation to the mechanism of misrepresentation of the Orient by some Orientalist authors. In relation to Foucault's definition on the meaning and constructive function of signs, Orientalists such as Gustave Flaubert and Richard Francis Burton have ordered the depictions of Orient. This study also aims to focus on the literary works of Gustave Flaubert and Richard Francis Burton from the viewpoint of Foucault's and Derrida's deconstructive ideas.

**Keywords:** Deconstruction, Misrepresentation of Orient, Orientalists, Post-Structuralism

### 1.Foucauldian Approach to Orientalism

In his book '*The Order of Things*', Michel Foucault scrutinizes the knowledge that has been manipulated to establish a thought leading binary opposition. He stresses on the hidden impact of sign as follows:

Once the sign is located in the interstices of thought, two dimensions of analysis open up: investigations into the antitheses or inversions of representation in "non-actual but simultaneous ...comparisons, such as impressions, reminiscences, imaginings, memories all aspects of the image in time" (Foucault, 1994, p. 69).

Before focusing on Said's deconstructive challenge on the issues of knowledge, power and representation, the initial attempt must be directed to Orientalists' representation of Orient in their literary works. The Orientalists have created a language through which they have imposed their thoughts and imaginings about Orient by using some encoded signs. Foucault solves this ordered mechanism of signs and defines it as "Here the order of things is not what determines the relation of the sign to its content; rather, the idea of one thing and the idea of another. As a result of this bond, signs are coextensive with thought itself and any theory of signification is precluded (1994, p. 65).

In relation to Foucault's definition on the meaning and constructive function of signs, Orientalists, such as Gustave Flaubert and Richard Francis Burton have ordered depictions of Orient. In his work '*Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*' Burton depicts a Muslim land full of misrepresentations. The words he chooses to portray what he observes remind the readers of the mechanism that Foucault defines. The descriptions about the Orient contain words that connote negative comparisons and representations. He describes as "This year Ramadan befell in June, and a fearful infliction was that 'blessed

month', making the Muslim unhealthy and unamiable" (1964, p. 74). Regardless of the spiritual meaning of Ramadan for Muslims and its unique and divine place in the hearts of Muslims, he sets or orders his words such as 'unhealthy and unamiable' to construct a negative thought or what Foucault defines "establish a bond inside knowledge" (Foucault, 1994, p. 63). Instead of considering the Month of Ramadan as a kind of religious ritual or responsibility through which all Muslims fulfill their religious mission for the sake of pleasing God, Flaubert attempts to display this religious ritual as negative fact of which effects has profoundly led Muslims to indulge in misanthropic attitudes. He goes on further negative descriptions as:

Their voices, never of the softest, acquire, especially after noon, a terribly harsh and creaking tone. The men curse one another and beat the women. The women slap and abuse the children, and these in their turn cruelly entreat, and use bad language to the dogs and cats (Burton, 1964, p. 74).

In his set of the order of things, it is realized that the evil is created by men and in turn passes to woman, children and the animals. Like a chain, the misrepresentation ends up with a bad language to the animals. In other ways, what Burton intends to depict is the generalization of one particular event that he observes in a Muslim land. His subjective observations result in negative perceptions about the Islam and its followers. He goes on his observations as " In the bazaars and streets, pale long drawn faces, looking for the most part intolerably cross, catch your eye, and at this season, a stranger will sometimes meet with positive incivility"(1964, p. 75).

In his work '*The Temptation of St. Antony*', another Orientalist, Gustave Flaubert portrays what he sees in a distant land by dwelling on a unique incident which is to manipulate readers to reach a general comment about the Orient as:

Meanwhile, the populace continued to torture the confessors; and I was led back to Alexandria by an ardent thirst for martyrdom. I found on my arrival that the persecution had ceased three days before. Just as I was returning, my path was blocked by a great crowd in front of the Temple of Serapis. I was told that the Governor was about to make one final example. In the centre of the portico, in the broad light of day, a naked woman was fastened to a pillar, while two soldiers were scourging her. At each stroke her entire frame writhed. Suddenly, she cast a wild look around, her trembling lips parted; and, above the heads of the multitude, her figure wrapped, as it were, in her flowing hair, me thought I recognized Ammonaria...Yet this one was taller-and beautiful, exceedingly! (5).

When Flaubert encounters that scene a 'simultaneous comparison' process is on progress in the minds of readers (Foucault, 1994, p. 63). The image of a naked woman reminds Flaubert of Ammonaria who represents a positive image in his imagining. In her article "Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals" Lau (2009) quotes Edward Said's comment on Flaubert's encounter with an Oriental prostitute:

*which produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was 'typically Oriental' (6).*

According to Lau "Said's argument was that Flaubert's situation in relation to Kuchuk Hanem illustrated a parallel situation to that between the Occident and the Orient" (2009, p. 572).

## 2. Said's Approach to Orientalists

What Said challenges is the systematic manipulations of those Orientalists who have established a binary opposition process in their works so as to misrepresent the Orient. Said focuses on this as follows:

Rather than listing all the figures of speech associated with the Orient-its strangeness, its difference, its exotic sensuousness, and so forth- we can generalize about them as they are handed down through the Renaissance. They are all declarative and self-evident; the tense they employ is the timeless eternal; they convey an impression of repetition and strength; they are always symmetrical to, and yet diametrically inferior to, a European equivalent (Said, 1979, p. 72).

Said deconstructs what European Orientalists have 'located in the interstices of thought' by giving specific examples from their depictions as:

What this discourse considers to be a fact – that Mohammed is an imposter, for example- is a component of the discourse, a statement the discourse compels one to make whenever the name Mohammed occurs. Underlying all the different units of Orientalist discourse-by which I mean simply the vocabulary employed whenever the Orient is spoken or written about-is a set of representative figures, or tropes (71).

Said's specific example in relation to discourse has root in Foucault's definition of how discourse functions in establishing representation in the minds of readers as "Henceforth, the primary Text is effaced, and with it, the entire, inexhaustible foundation of the words whose mute being was inscribed in things; all that remains is representation, unfolding in the verbal signs that manifest it, and hence becoming discourse (Foucault, 1994, p. 88). This mechanism works for readers without questioning the background of the given knowledge. Said (1979) goes on to deepen this fact as "Mohammed is an imposter, the very phrase canonized in d'Herbelot'sBibliothèque and dramatized in a sense by Dante. No background need be given; the evidence necessary to convict Mohammed is contained in the 'is' (Said, 1979, p. 72). Foucault draws the attention to the point that the construction is formed to lead readers swallow the hidden intent as:

When this discourse becomes, in turn, an object of language, it is not questioned as if it were saying something without actually saying it, as if it were a language enclosed upon itself; one no longer attempts to uncover the great enigmatic statement that lies hidden beneath its signs; one asks how it functions: what representations it designates. (Foucault, 1994, p. 88).

By applying what Foucault puts forth to Said's deconstructive claim, it is realized that this systematical construction functions as a trap in which readers' interferences to text evaporate and be depended on the encoded signs. Said stresses on this:

*One does not qualify the phrase, neither does it seem necessary to say that Mohammed was not an imposter, nor need one consider for a moment that it may not be necessary to repeat the statement. It is repeated, he is an imposter, and each time one says it, he becomes more of an imposter and the author of the statement gains a little more authority in having declared it (Said, 1979, p. 72).*

In conclusion, what Said does is to deconstruct the Orientalists' misrepresentations of the Orient by dwelling on post-structuralists' principles. Attempting from the function of signs in

creating an encoded message or representation in the depictions of Orientalists, Said challenges them by decoding their hidden intent via their own literal weapons.

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